

Design Resource

Kalamkari Work - Srikalahasti

Hand Painted Stories

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and
Tejesh J.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/kalamkari-work-sri-kalahasti>



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Introduction

Srikalahasti is one of the main pilgrimage center located in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, 39kms from Tirupati another well-known pilgrimage city. Srikalahasti got its name from the disciples of Lord Shiva, is also one of the ancient Shiva temples in southern India. Located near the banks of river Swarnamukhi which acts as a main source for a popular textile painting called Kalamkari which are hand painted stories and themes of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Painting being one of the most basic expression of visual art and design, which is a medium that has achieved heights in terms of explorations in different techniques. Indian artists established different insight of tradition and culture by creating accord visually on a wide array of surfaces like metal surfaces, terracotta, glass, trees almost all possible mediums. Textiles are considered as the most widely used canvas for Indian artists which is also the home for textiles.

“Kalam” refers to a pen used in painting whereas “Kari” in urdu means craftsmanship involved, hence called “Kalamkari”, it has come a long way since it was started around 3000 years, there were many trial and errors in the beginning of kalamkari. The exquisite art of Kalamkari is ancient form of textile painting, which has a rich heritage, it can be dated back to the early period of alliance during the trade of Indian and Persian trade merchants who identified any textile paintings. Artists have evolved from their ancient art of painting stories through time and fashion.

Kalamkari in Srikalahasti has been around for 200 years approximately. Unlike other places where this particular craft is practiced, artists in Srikalahasti retains the ancient techniques of dyeing which have been passed down from generations. Kalamkari probably started in south India to illustrate temple rituals.

Kalamkari painting involves a whole of 23 to 25 steps of dyeing, bleaching, hand painting, outlining drawing, washing and ironing. In short, chanderi or cotton cloth is bought from the market and washed in plain water to remove starch and dried, then washed and soaked in a solution of cow dung, milk and Chebulic myrobalan locally called karakha pindhi for approximately 1 to 2 hours and dried, which is ready for the basic outline drawing with a help of burnt tamarind stick which acts as charcoal/ chalk piece, once the basic outline is done, with the help of a thin bamboo stick (Kalam) outlines are drawn in black colour, the inside are then hand painted with a single colour using kalam, and again washed in plain water. For maroon/ red colour the cloth is soaked in boiling water for the colour to stick to the fabric. The washing process repeats until all the colours are applied. At the final stage, the cloth is washed, ironed and packed accordingly to be sent to the customer.

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Kalamkari is one of the oldest techniques of textile painting.

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Peacock pattern painted on the cotton cloth with blue background.



Majorly women artisans are involved in this craft.



Painting of Goddess Lakshmi.

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Bright color paints give the fabric and design an exclusive look.



Paintings are made on different types of fabric.



All the colors are prepared from natural ingredients.



Painting process is done in such a way that the colors don't overpower each other.

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Different type of pen is made particularly to paint or color.



Different types dying process is used to bring out the richness of the natural colors.



To make the apparels format of the cloth is painted with the required size, which is later cut and stitched.

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Fabric is dyed after each colour is painted to avoid blotting of colors.



Traditional motif's paintings are more in demand compared to other designs.



Few paintings are embroidered with beads and sparkling threads to make it more appealing.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Basic tool used in Kalamkari painting is undoubtedly the Kalamkari pen and then comes natural dyes, burnt tamarind stick and kalamkari magam. Kalamkari pen is made out of bamboo reed, sharpened at one end and a cloth rolled on the stick in a particular pattern and a thread is tied around the cotton cloth to secure the cloth at the required place. Cotton cloth acts as filler when dipped in dye and then used on to the fabric. The pen is first dipped in required dye and it is gently squeezed for the colour to flow on the area, which needs to be painted. The pen which is used in the outlines are sharp compared to the one used to fill in large areas. Burnt tamarind sticks are also used to draw the outlines. Kalamkari maggam, a wooden frame is used while painting which, secures the cloth on both ends.

Different colours of vegetable dyes used are:

1. Mayrabolan (Karakha Pindhi mixed with cow milk) forms light yellow.
2. Kassim kaaram (Jaggery + Rusted iron filings + water) black outlines for the fabric.
3. Natural Indigo produces Blue.
4. Pomegranate produces Golden yellow.
5. Catechu (Suryadu chakka) produces Rosemary.
6. Algerian produces Red.
7. Alum mixed with water gives out Gray.
8. Cow Milk (Highlights the colour on the fabric).

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Plain white cotton fabric is basically used to make Kalamkari painting.

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Design sheets are used as reference to draw the motifs on the fabric.



Brush made out of bamboo reed and cotton cloth.



Alum is mixed with color to strengthen the hold of color on the fabric.

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Algerian is used to produce the color red.



Indigo blue to produce blue color.



Pomegranate peel called as Karaka poo is used to produce golden yellow color.



Tamarind tree sticks are burnt and used as charcoal to draw the design on the fabric.

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Mayrabolan fruit powder is mixed with milk and used in dying process to give creamish shade to the fabric.



Plastic containers are used to mix the colors.



Border woven fabrics are also used to paint.



Another natural dye locally known as Khatta is used to obtain a lighter shade of red.

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Making Process



Dyeing Process



Drawing the Design



Color and Brush



Painting

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Dyeing Process

Kalamkari being one of the earliest and most complex techniques of textile painting uses natural vegetable dyes for colours, different sarees can take up to 2 to 3 months for completion and a simple one may complete in 10 days also, however many artists involve themselves in a single saree while painting. The outline is drawn by the experienced craftsmen and the areas inside are drawn by the less experienced. Making of Kalamkari can be classified into 3 different steps,

Preparation of Chanderi / cotton cloth:

Chanderi fabric costs around ₹125 per meter usually bought from the local market, it is then washed with plain water to remove the starch and dried. After drying the fabric is then treated with a solution of mayrabolan fruit and cow milk. Mayrabolan fruit (karakha pindhi) is grinded and squeezed to obtain milk which is mixed with pure cow milk. The cloth is evenly soaked in this solution for 15 to 20 minutes, squeezed to remove excess solution and dried again in natural sunlight for 6 to 8 hours and stored in room temperature for one day, then finally the fabric is ready to be painted. Weather conditions are also prioritized, because a single drop of rainwater can sabotage the process. Rainwater mixed in this solution can make the fabric vulnerable while sketching there is a danger of colour spreading in the fabric. This process is done because in turn smoothens the cloth and makes sure that the outline colour (black) doesn't spread while drawing.

For Ten Metres of Chanderi or Cotton cloth	Myrobolan Myrobolan = 150 Grams
	Cow Milk = 2 litres



Mayrabolan powder and milk is used as a dying ingredient.



Tamarind tree sticks are burnt and used as charcoal to draw the design on the fabric.

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Mayrabolan powder is added to the milk.



The mixture is mixed with hand to obtain a solution.

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A diluted solution paste is obtained.



Cotton fabric is dipped in the solution.



Fabric is nicely immersed in the solution so that it applies evenly all over the fabric.

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Dyed fabric is put under the sun to dry.

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Color and Brush

1. Brush Making (Kalam)

Kalam or kalamkari pen is basically prepared with a small bamboo stick, one end of the stick is sharpened until required, pure cotton cloth is rolled on, near the sharpened edge of the stick and then tied tightly in a crisscross pattern with a cotton thread making sure that the cotton cloth stays in the exact position. Cotton is used because it acts as an ink pillar and which absorbs colour and makes it easier for the artisan to draw on the fabric. Instead of a cotton cloth many times a lump of cotton is also tied to the bamboo stick allowing more absorption of colour mostly this is used in the inside areas of the fabric which has to be painted. Flow of ink depends upon the material used in kalam, for outlines, a cotton cloth (ex: - bandage cloth) is used for precision drawing. The thickness of the tip actually determines the fineness of the line drawn.

2. Natural Vegetable Dyes

Natural vegetable dyes were discovered by our ancestors through a lot of effort and persistence, natural dyes can be found in various different places. There are around 500 colour giving plants, but only a few are found in abundance which are cost effective and produce good colour which can be used in textile industries.

Extraction of Colour I

- Local Name: Karakha pindhi / Kadukka pinju
- Botanical Name: Terminalia chebula
- Fruit Name: Mayrabolan
- Colour Obtained: Light yellow

Mayrabolan is actually a fruit which can be obtained from Terminalia chebula, this basically forms a pale yellow / greenish yellow colour. It also acts as a natural mordant and is used in textiles. This particular fruit is used because of the high tannin content in it. Mayrabolan is available in powdered form which costs around ₹90 per kg. This treatment also helps the fabric to absorb required metallic mordant.

Preperation of Yellow colour (	Mayrabolan fruit 100 grams
Mayrabolan fruit)	Water 1500 ml
	2 teaspoons of alum

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Extraction of Colour II

- Local Name: Kassim kaaram
- Colour obtained: Black

Kasim kaaram (Black colour) is obtained from jaggery, rusted iron filings and water. Initially these materials are immersed in water and allowed to settle for around 15 to 20 days. The reaction of molasses and iron filings is called ferrous acetate. This solution when drawn on mayrabalam treated cloth turns into a permanent black because of the reaction between ferrous acetate and tannin, it is later stored in a drum or a closed container.

Preperation of Black colour (Kassim Karam)	Cane Jaggery = 300 grams, Palm Jaggery 150 grams
	Rusted Iron filings = 2 Kg
	Water 10 litres

Extraction of Colour III

- Common Name: Natural Indigo, blue, indigo
- Botanical Name: Indigofera tinctoria
- Colour obtained: Blue

Indigo blue is said to be one of the most ancient natural dyes which is obtained from Indigo leaves which is mixed with locally available sand, near river banks and allowed to settle and then filtered. The filtered solution is mixed with indigo leaves and left for around 21 days, if the process is done in less or more amount of time the output of indigo blue is either dull or too dark. So 21 days is the appropriate time for the right shade of Indigo blue.

Extraction of Colour IV

- Common Name: Pomegranate
- Locally Called: Karakha Pooh
- Botanical Name: Punica granatum
- Colour obtained: Golden yellow

The upper part of the fruit pomegranate also called persistent calyx which is finely powdered and mixed with water, stirred and then boiled to high temperatures where it becomes a fine paste and it's then stored. After a week's time, fine paste is then squashed by hand and yellow colour is produced, it is also available in the market for ₹700 per kg.

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Extraction of Colour V

- Common Name: Catechu
- Locally Called : Suryada chakka
- Botanical Name: Accacia catechu
- Colour obtained: Rosemary

Catechu mixed with alum is initially soaked in water for a minimum of 3 days and till it becomes soft, it is boiled until a point and then stored for 8-10 days which is then ready to be used. Price of catechu is around ₹900 – 1000 per kg which is also available in kalamkari related stores.

Extraction Colour VI

- Colour Obtained: Gray

Colour is obtained when Alum is mixed with water for a ratio of 1:4.

Extraction of Colour VII

- Common Name: Algerian
- Colour obtained: Red

Algerian is a chemical which is readily available in the market for ₹1,800 per kg, in olden days the seeds of pomegranate, alum and bark of mango tree was mixed to make red colour. Kalamkari artists usually prefer buying it from the local market because it is expensive and it is not easily available.

The colour green is obtained by mixing two colours which are yellow and blue which results in darker shade of green, Yellow and black forms a more lighter shade of green.

There are various other colours, which are used at times on customer's requests or orders, some of the colours are also pigment based.

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Cotton cloth shred is rolled on a bamboo stick to absorb the paint.



Cotton thread is tied around the cotton shred.



The pen is dipped into a paint completely.



Natural ingredients are used to obtain various colours.

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To obtain a colour Algerian powder is mixed with water.



Natural indigo is mixed with water to obtain the color blue.

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Ingredients are soaked in water, to get the required color.

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Alum is mixed with the colors to bring richness on the fabric.

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Drawing the Design

Charcoal Pencil

Small tamarind sticks are burnt which are then covered with sand, in order to cool them gradually without making them brittle. If water is added to the fire the sticks becomes useless for drawing outlines on fabric. Burnt Tamarind sticks acts as a pencil when drawn on the fabric.

Tracing the outlines

Artisans make themselves comfortable on the floor while drawing outlines using a scholar's writing desk, they stretch the fabric and clip it on both ends which makes it easier for the artisan to draw. Only experienced artisans are preferred to draw the outlines as it has to be elegant and precise, it takes usually three months for a trainee to learn to draw the outlines and it takes almost fifteen days to learn to fill colours in the fabric. Running designs are drawn free hand without any reference for experienced artisans. Burnt tamarind stick is used to drawn the outlines of the fabric, however experienced artisans directly draw outlines with black colour (kassim karam) using kalamkari pen. Under extreme temperatures kassim cannot be drawn on the fabric as it spreads, so in the month of April and March kalamkari work happens early morning.

Tracing is usually done on special customer orders or on a particular god/ goddesses which artisans are not familiar with the design, Master draws the outline/ design on the butter sheet or tracing paper and small holes are pierced along the borders on the sheet. The tracing sheet is then kept on the fabric and black powder is sprinkled along the borders, which forms an outline on the fabric below.

Kalamkari pen is one the oldest and tradition way of kalamkari painting.



Outlines of the design is drawn on the fabric using burnt stick of tamarind tree.

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The outline is painted with the solution made out of Jaggery and rusted iron.



Experienced Artisans paint the design directly on the fabric.



The final design is obtained on the fabric.

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Fabric is clipped to a table for stiffness of cloth to paint.



A woolen fabric is spread beneath the cotton fabric to observe the paint.



Once the outlining is completed the designs are painted with black color in required areas.

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Painting

Kalamkari designs, motifs and painting forms have emerged from inspirations from palaces, monuments and temples found in India, along with designs of wildlife. Kalamkari handmade painting are done on various fabrics like Pure Cotton, Pure Silk, Chiffon, georgette and chanderi. Pure cotton and chanderi are the most popular fabrics used in Srikalahasti because of its unique quality making it easier for the kalamkari artist to draw and paint. It is available in Chennai, Bangalore and Maharashtra.

Setting up Wooden Frame

Wooden frame also known as kalamkari magam which is an adjustable wooden frame on two sides, once the fabric is attached at one end it is then stretched slightly to the other end secured and locked using a wooden piece locally called karra. The wooden frame can be adjusted even at the later stages if the artisan requires more elasticity in the fabric. Usually thin cloth goes on to the frame because it is easier to draw and paint, much thicker fabric like cotton are laid on the ground with a woolen cloth underneath for protection.

Painting on Fabric

After the outlines on the fabric are drawn using kassim karam / black using the kalamkari pen, the fabric is stretched full length on the ground or on the kalamkari maggam (wooden frame), and then the colouring filling process starts. On a single cloth up to ten artisans take up separate spaces to fill colour in different areas. Kara-ka pooh (maroon) and alum is mixed together to form a solution, alum is basically colourless but also acts as a highlight to the colour when painted, it also is a natural mordant which makes the colour stick firmly to the fabric. The areas, which are to be filled in red/ maroon, are first painted and then left to dry under diffused sunlight for 1 to 2 days until the fabric absorbs the colour completely. The fabric is washed in a rhythmic manner making sure that excess alum is removed, flowing water is best suitable, as the excess alum and colour removed from end should not stick to the other end of the fabric. Cloth is then dried well under direct sunlight and boiled in water with temperatures of around 80 to 100 Celsius and dried. The fabric is again soaked in pure milk and dried. Milk acts as wax, which prevents colour from spreading on the fabric when other colours are applied later on. The fabric is then painted with vibrant colours using kalamkari pen, different colours such as grey, yellow, golden and blue are painted. Alum is used in all colours because it possesses a mordant quality. Wet cotton is gently pressed on the coloured area to remove excess colour. Finally the cloth is soaked in luke-warm water to remove excess alum and colour, it is again washed in flowing water to remove impurities and then ironed which is ready to be sent to the customer. Kalamkari painting on sarees can take up to 50 days to complete depending on the design and pattern. Running designs are much common in the present times however every master kalamkari artist has their own style and creativity to implement various styles of designs and motifs.

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Kalamkari Work - Srikalahasti

Hand Painted Stories

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

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NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/kalamkari-work-sri-kalahasti/making-process/painting>

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Few areas are painted with black color to show the depth of the design.



Red color is painted after black color.



While painting the red color solution gives yellow shade and turns bright red after drying.



When all the required areas are painted with red colour on the fabric, it is kept to dry for two days.

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Dried cloth is boiled in water from 80 to 100 degree.



Then it is washed in cold water.



Washed fabric is immersed in milk which brightens the colors painted, and it turns the unpainted areas to white color.

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It is then again washed with plain water.



All washed cloths are dried in the sun.



Dried cloth is fixed to the wooden frame to paint further.



Different color are applied to fill the design.

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Designs are filled with bright vivacious colors.



Artisan's sits together to paint on one fabric if it is big in size.



Green, red, blue and yellow are most commonly used colors.



For dress materials the design is measured in a required size and painted accordingly.

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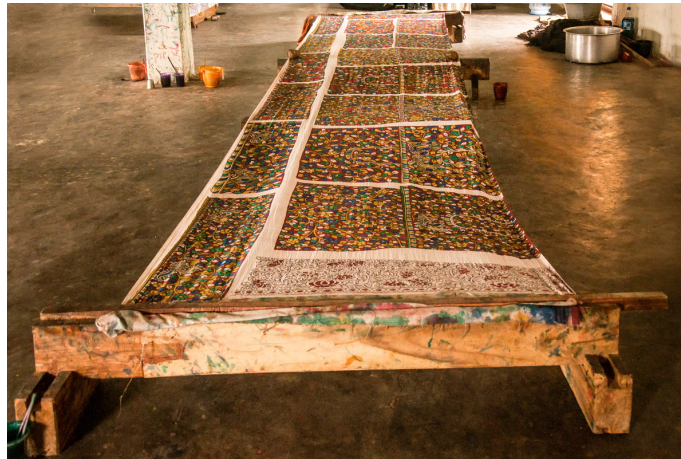
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The cloth rolled on the pen absorbs excess of paint.



Finished article is left to dry for almost two days.



Cloth is finally washed in warm water.

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The cloth is beaten on a stone slab to remove impurities.



Some fabrics are washed in big tanks of water or in flowing water.



Washed fabrics are then dried in sun and ironed before packing.

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Products

In earlier times where, folk singers used to travel from one village to another narrating stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata to the village people. In course of time narrating stories slowly transformed into painting, giving way to a new art form called Kalamkari. This ancient style of hand painting on textiles using a kalamkari pen is primarily done in Srikalahasti and has come a long way. Different motifs like flowers, peacock, and paisleys were usually done on kalamkari sarees. Basic inspiration was from historical architecture, forts and temples. Presently wall panels, dupatta (stole), sarees and wall hangings are made. Kalamkari artists have absolute freedom for individual expression while painting, no two products are the same unless it is customer's request. One of a kind qualities of kalamkari painting is all about the vibrant colours used and no shading is done. Intricate detailing is given to each product. Different stories and scenes of Hindu mythology are revealed as a series in dupattas and sarees. Kalamkari can be done on any material unlike olden days where only cotton was used. Silk, Tussar, Chiffon, georgette are some of the different materials where kalamkari painting can be done. Running designs are currently popular in Srikalahasti as people ask for new varieties in products so kalamkari artists have evolved from time to time to meet the customer's demands. However Kalamkari has been present for many generations and the ancient technique of vegetable dyes are used, the craft totally depends upon natural vegetable dyes and nearby riverbanks. Kalamkari is a labour intensive work as a simple patterned saree can take up to 20 days to complete and is washed 4 different times. Weather conditions matters a lot in kalamkari as rain water can ruin the outlines in the fabric where as high temperatures can make the colours spread. Starting price range of cotton sarees is ₹2700 and chanderi where the material is lighter, which costs ₹3500 to 4000.



Dress material painted with floral theme.

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Kalamkari painting of Lord Krishna.



Designs of peacock painted with different colors.



Painting of Krishna and Radha in the garden theme in the background.

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Colorful painting of Lord Krishna playing the flute.



A photo framed painting of Lord Ganesha playing Dholak and dancing.

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Dancers painted on cloth, each of the painted with different shades of colors.



Painting depicting the Scene of Ramayana.



Painted piece of a dress.



A Blouse piece painted with Kalamkari motif and embroidered with beads and threads.

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Borders of a dress painted with floral designs.



Design of a peacock and musical instrument painted and embroidered on a raw silk fabric.

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